

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 CAIRO 17690 01 OF 02 251714Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----050403 251718Z /46

R 251641Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1884
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 17690

EXDIS

AMMAN FOR ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR SOPN EG IS
SUBJECT: TALK WITH FONMIN KAMEL ABOUT EGYPTIAN PRESS
ATTACKS OF BEGIN

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING UP ON MY TALK WITH SADAT, I RAISED
WITH KAMEL TODAY SCURRILOUS EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS ON
BEGIN. SAID I THOUGHT THEY CONTRAVENED SADAT'S INSTRUCTIONS
AND ARE HARMFUL TO EGYPTIAN IMAGE AND OBJECTIVES. ESPECIALLY
BAD ARE OCTOBER MAGAZINE EDITOR ANIS MANSOUR'S SLANDEROUS
ATTACKS. I ASKED KAMEL CONVEY MY COMMENTS TO SADAT AND MY
URGING THAT HE ISSUE STRICTER INSTRUCTIONS TO CONFINE
CRITICISM TO POLICY MATTERS. ALTHOUGH KAMEL ALSO FINDS
BEGIN HARD TO STOMACH, HE AGREED WITH MY OBSERVATIONS
AND UNDERTOOK TO APPRISE SADAT OF THEM. I WILL FOLLOW UP
WITH SADAT AS NEEDED. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING MY MEETING WITH FONMIN KAMEL AND AHMED MAHER
TODAY, I RECALLED MY TALK OF YESTERDAY WITH SADAT ABOUT
EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS ON PRIME MINISTER BEGIN (CAIRO
17589). I NOTED THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD SAID THAT HE HAS
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 CAIRO 17690 01 OF 02 251714Z

GIVEN STRICT INSTRUCTIONS THAT ANY PRESS CRITICISM OF
BEGIN SHOULD BE OBJECTIVE AND NOT DELIBERATELY INSULTING.
SINCE THAT MEETING, I HAD SEEN FURTHER EGYPTIAN PRESS
ATTACKS ON BEGIN AND ESPECIALLY ANIS MANSOUR'S RATHER
SCURRILOUS COMMENTS ABOUT THE ISRAELI PRIMIN. AMONG OTHER
THINGS, MANSOUR REFERRED TO BEGIN AS THE "TERRORIST RABBI."
THIS KIND OF LANGUAGE, IT SEEMED TO ME, GOES

BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF PROPER CRITICISM. IT IS DELIBERATELY INSULTING AND, IF I UNDERSTOOD SADAT CORRECTLY, IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH THE PRESIDENT'S INSTRUCTIONS. UNDERSTANDABLY, THIS TYPE OF SCURRILOUS ATTACK CAN ONLY HAVE THE EFFECT OF MAKING EVEN ISRAELI OPPONENTS OF BEGIN RALLY AROUND HIM.

2. WHILE IT WAS NOT MY BUSINESS TO SUGGEST TO EGYPTIAN JOURNALISTS WHAT THEY SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT WRITE, I HAD TO TELL HIM IN ALL CANDOR THAT THESE UNRESTRAINED ATTACKS ON BEGIN ARE HURTING THE EGYPTIAN CAUSE. THEY ALIENATE FRIENDS AND FOES ALIKE. THE PRESS ATTACKS OF ANIS MANSOUR, WITH HIS LONG REPUTATION OF ANTI-SEMITISM, ARE ESPECIALLY HARMFUL TO EGYPT. BECAUSE OF HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH SADAT AND HIS WEEKLY INTERVIEWS WITH THE PRESIDENT, PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT WHAT HE WRITES REFLECTS SADAT'S VIEWS. SINCE KAMEL WILL BE MEETING WITH SADAT TOMORROW IN ALEXANDRIA, I ASKED THAT HE CONVEY TO THE PRESIDENT MY COMMENTS AND MY PERSONAL COUNSEL THAT SUCH SCURRILOUS ATTACKS ON BEGIN SHOULD BE STOPPED. NO ONE CAN OBJECT TO OBJECTIVE CRITICISM OF ISRAELI POLICY, BUT STOOPING TO CHEAP INSULTS IS UNWORTHY OF GOE AND BESMIRCHES THE PRESIDENT'S REPUTATION.

3. KAMEL'S INITIAL REACTION WAS MIXED. HE SAID THAT HE, TOO, FINDS BEGIN HARD TO STOMACH. THE ISRAELI PRI-
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 CAIRO 17690 01 OF 02 251714Z

MIN'S INFLEXIBILITY IS "KILLING" THE PEACE PROCESS. HE HAD HIS OWN DESCRIPTIONS OF BEGIN. I SAID THAT THIS WAS HIM BUSINESS, BUT I THOUGHT HE WOULD AGREE THAT PERSONAL VIEWS OF THAT TYPE SHOULD BE KEPT TO ONESELF. WHATEVER HIS VIEWS, HE WAS NOT MAKING PUBLIC STATEMENTS OFFENSIVE TO BEGIN. I KNEW THAT BEGIN'S POLICIES ARE ANATHEMA TO GOE, BUT KAMEL WAS CERTAINLY WELL AWARE THAT BEGIN IS PRIMIN AND WE MUST WORK WITH HIM. WHAT I WAS URGING WAS SOME SENSIBLE RESTRAINT ON EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS IN EGYPT'S OWN SELF-INTEREST.

4. KAMEL AGREED THAT, WHATEVER HIS PERSONAL VIEWS ON BEGIN, THE EGYPTIAN PRESS SHOULD NOT STOOP TO CHEAP SLANDER. HE ADMITTED THAT IT IS IN GOE'S OWN INTEREST TO AVOID PRESS ATTACKS THAT STRENGTHEN BEGIN AT HOME AND ABROAD AND CAUSE EMBARRASSMENT FOR SADAT'S FRIENDS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE IS ESPECIALLY CONCERNED ABOUT MANSOUR'S WRITINGS BECAUSE OF THE LATTER'S PERCEIVED CLOSENESS TO THE PRESIDENT. KAMEL UNDERTOOK TO RAISE THE MATTER WITH SADAT TOMORROW AND TO REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT MY COMMENTS. HE DOUBTED THAT SADAT HAD SEEN THE LAST MANSOUR EDITORIAL IN OCTOBER MAGAZINE AND OPINED THAT THE

PRESIDENT WILL ALSO CONSIDER MANSOUR'S DESCRIPTION OF BEGIN AS SCURRILOUS. HE HOPED THAT HE COULD PERSUADE THE PRESIDENT TO ISSUE STRICTER INSTRUCTIONS THAT ANY FUTURE CRITICISMS OF BEGIN SHOULD AVOID THE PERSONAL AND FOCUS ON EGYPTIAN UNHAPPINESS WITH THE ISRAELI PRIMIN'S POLICIES.

5. I TOLD KAMEL THAT WHEN I NEXT SEE THE PRESIDENT, I

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PAGE 01 CAIRO 17690 02 OF 02 251716Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 CAIRO 17690
EXDIS
WILL ALSO AGAIN RAISE THE MATTER WITH HIM.

6. COMMENT: THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT SADAT IS PERSONALLY BITTER ABOUT WHAT HE CONSIDERS BEGIN'S FAILURE TO RESPOND ADEQUATELY TO HIS INITIATIVE. SADAT MAY INDEED HAVE GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS THAT EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS ON BEGIN BE OBJECTIVE, BUT THESE ARE SUBJECT TO INTERPRETATION AND THERE IS INADEQUATE MONITORING OF JOURNALISTS AND THEIR PRODUCTS. SADAT, UNFORTUNATELY, HAS A GREAT DEAL OF CONFIDENCE IN MANSOUR, ALTHOUGH I DOUBT THAT HE EVER TAKES THE TIME TO READ MANSOUR'S EDITORIALS. I HOPE THAT KAMEL WILL FAITHFULLY REPORT MY COMMENTS TO SADAT AND THAT, TOGETHER WITH MY PERTINENT TALK WITH THE PRESIDENT OF YESTERDAY, HE WILL TAKE SOME STEPS TO CURB THE ABUSIVE TONE THAT HAS CREPT INTO EGYPTIAN EDITORIALS ON BEGIN. IF SCURRILOUS ATTACKS DO NOT STOP, I WILL AGAIN RAISE MATTER WITH SADAT WHEN WE NEXT MEET.
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